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Social controls supporting the biracial system in the United States are primarily legal and are often in conflict with the prevailing moral and religious precepts. The Negro protest is not only against widespread deprivations, but also against relative deprivations or barriers designed to prevent them from enjoying certain rights and privileges that are regarded as ethically, morally, and socially legitimate for other Americans.

Negroes have never accepted their subordinate social status as morally, ethically, or legally just. Consequently, despite the present danger of retaliation from white supremacists and the threat of a white "backlash," they have always registered their protest. As a rule, the Negro protest has been directed against customs and laws designed to place unusual limits on their freedom, to prevent them from gaining recognition and status, and to subject them to indignities and rejection. The Negro protest is a reaffirmation of the faith Negroes have in the democratic process.

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THE RISE OF THE NEGRO PROTEST

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The Rise of the Negro Protest

By DANIEL C. THOMPSON

ABSTRACT: Social controls supporting the biracial system in the United States are primarily corporal and legal and are often in conflict with prevailing moral and religious precepts. The Negro protest is not simply against widespread deprivations *per se*, but rather against "relative deprivations," or barriers designed to prevent them from enjoying certain rights and privileges that are regarded as ethically, morally, and socially legitimate for other Americans. At no time have Negroes accepted their subordinate social status as morally, ethically, or legally just. Consequently, despite the present danger of retaliation from white supremacists and the constant threat of a white "backlash," they have always registered their protest. As a rule, the Negro protest has been directed against customs and laws designed to place unusual limits on their freedom, threaten their security as citizens, prevent them from receiving the recognition and status they might merit, and subject them to indignities and rejection. The Negro protest is, itself, a clear endorsement of the "American Creed" and a reaffirmation of the faith Negroes have in the democratic process.

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PRACTICALLY all studies of Negro-white relations assume, or attempt to document, the existence of a rigid division of American society in terms of a white upper caste and a Negro lower caste. One of the most fruitful definitions of "color caste" holds that it is essentially a system of privileges and punishments which interferes in the efforts of Negroes to follow certain basic biological and social drives.[1] That is to say, the system of social relationships in the United States, particularly in the South, is designed by customs and laws to accord white people certain rights and privileges which are deliberately withheld from Negro people regardless of how nearly they may approximate the highest prevailing academic, cultural, and moral standards.

There are, of course, those who question the use of the concept "color caste" as an accurate or legitimate description of the social status of Negroes. Some social scientists insist that when we use the Indian social system as a model, the concept "caste" implies a far more static arrangement of social relationships than is characteristic of the biracial system in the United States. Furthermore, it is argued, the Indian caste system is based primarily upon rather stable theological and moral beliefs, while the biracial system in the United States articulates an inherent pragmatism in which relatively fluid economic and political alliances are paramount considerations.[2] Thus, whereas social controls characteristic of a caste system stem mainly from the respect the great masses have for traditional moral and ethical precepts inherent in their culture, social controls supporting the biracial system in the United States are primarily corporal and legal and are often in conflict with prevailing moral and religious precepts. This fact is most fundamental to an understanding of the Negro protest movement. In a word, the Negro protest is not simply against widespread deprivation *per se*, but rather against "relative deprivations," or barriers designed to prevent them from enjoying certain rights and privileges that are regarded as ethically, morally, and socially legitimate for other Americans.[3] Consequently, no matter how the controversy regarding the concept "caste" as an accurate description of the status of Negroes may be resolved, the fact remains that

> At no time have Negroes accepted their their subordinate social status as morally, ethically, or legally just. . . . Negro leaders have always defined the restrictions inherent in the low status ascribed to them as punishment. Thus, the ethos of the Negro subculture has never been characterized by resignation and fatalism.[4]

Although Negroes have always resented the disesteemed social status to which they are assigned in American society, they have been unable to do much about it themselves because they are virtually powerless. Therefore, since Negroes have no organized social power strong enough to exert the leverage necessary to force improvements in their social status, they have had to rely mainly upon the strategy of protest. Even protest has always been

[1] Allison Davis and John Dollard, *Children of Bondage* (Washington, D.C.: American Council on Education, 1940), pp. 243–244.

[2] See Oliver C. Cox, *Caste, Class and Race* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1948), pp. 65–66; Gunnar Myrdal, with the assistance of Richard Sterner and Arnold Rose, *An American Dilemma* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1944), pp. 642–643, and for a comprehensive summary of this controversy, see Gerald D. Berreman, "Caste in India and in the United States," *The American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. LXVI (September 1960), pp. 120–127.

[3] Gunnar Myrdal, *op. cit.*, pp. xlv–xlvii.

[4] Daniel C. Thompson, *The Negro Leadership Class* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1963), pp. 18–19.

fraught with some degree of danger from the backlash of zealous white supremacists who will take any extreme measure to keep Negroes economically, politically, and socially powerless. Yet, somehow, despite real dangers, Negroes have continued to find more or less reliable techniques of expressing their dissatisfaction with the unusual restrictions imposed upon them as a racial group. Therefore, as we shall see in the following pages, Negro leaders have, out of necessity, developed the protest strategy to the point of a fine art.

The central purpose of this paper is to examine the Negro protest movement in terms of its essential nature, techniques, and consequences.

THE NATURE OF NEGRO PROTEST

As suggested earlier, the Negro protest movement has not been directed against major deprivations inherent in the American social system as such, but rather it has been focused against "relative deprivations," or *inequalities* Negroes experience as American citizens. Therefore, in at least one fundamental respect Negro protest is unlike any other mass protest or revolution in history: its grand strategy is designed to achieve goals and effectuate values that are already acknowledged to be inherent in a political democracy and which are firmly established in our national culture. Consequently, Negro protest leaders do not advocate the overthrow of constitutional laws, changing the basic structure of our republican form of government, rearrangement of the American class structure, or the establishment of new political, economic, and ethical goals. Instead—except for a small extremist element—the Negro protest, itself, is a clear endorsement of the "American Creed" and a reaffirmation of the faith which the great majority of Negroes have in the essential goodness of the individual and in the democratic process.

Perhaps the most promising clue to an understanding of the real nature of Negro protest has been provided by the eminent American social scientist, W. I. Thomas. According to him all basic human wishes can be subsumed under four general categories: the desire for new experience, the desire for security, the desire for recognition, and the desire for response.[5]

New experiences

Though many basic human desires may be classified under the general heading of "new experiences," in one way or another all of them presuppose freedom of the individual. Thus, fundamentally, the desire for new experiences is the very fountainhead of the broad urge to explore, to adventure and to create.

Conditions under slavery. Certainly no other racial group has had freedom withheld from it for so long and so completely as has the Negro. Soon after its founding each American colony began systematically to force Negroes into slavery. Virginia made the practice legal in 1661; after this the number of slaves increased rapidly. Negro resentment mounted, and masters lived in fear of slave uprisings.

> The colonial assembly therefore adopted a rigid slave code, restricting the freedom of movement of the slaves, inflicting severe penalties for even minor offenses and denying slaves civil and criminal rights.[6]

This succinct summary of the status of slaves by Professor Logan indicates

[5] W. I. Thomas, "The Four Wishes and the Definition of the Situation," in Talcott Parsons, *et al.* (eds.), *Theories of Society* (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1961), Vol. II, pp. 741–744.

[6] Rayford W. Logan, *The Negro In The United States* (New York: D. Van Nostrand, 1957), p. 9.

the extent to which slaves were denied all of the elementary freedoms, of "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness," the "founding fathers" adopted as a guideline for the establishment of any legitimate government. Furthermore, as severe as were the legal restrictions imposed upon slaves, they were mild when compared with the extralegal sanctions allowed slave masters. Negroes were completely at the whim of their masters and enjoyed no degree of freedom their masters elected to deny them.[7]

Whatever limited degree of freedom might have been allowed slaves under the several versions of "Black Codes" and the extralegal prerogatives accorded the individual slave masters, was destroyed by the 1857 Dred Scott decision. It was then that the United States Supreme Court ruled that a Negro born to a slave was not an American citizen and, in effect, had no rights that his master needed to respect.[8]

Without doubt the system of slavery was designed, in every particular, to curtail, and in some instances to completely withhold from Negroes, the privilege, or freedom, to satisfy a basic human desire—the desire for new experience.

Jim Crow laws.[9] Immediately after the collapse of the Confederacy, the South set about the creation of a system of racial segregation and discrimination as a substitute for the outlawed slave system. At first this system was informal and contrary to the spirit of Reconstruction. Nevertheless, bitterness on the part of the defeated South, almost complete economic destitution, the awkwardness of Negroes as citizens, plus the ideological confusion of Northern liberals and "carpetbaggers," and the ready willingness of the federal government to compromise on the citizenship status of Negroes for the sake of national unity proved to be a potent combination of ingredients that fertilized the soil for the speedy growth of a durable biracial system. The avowed main purpose of this system was to keep Negroes completely powerless in local and national affairs.

The very eloquent spokesman for the "New South" after the Civil War, Henry W. Grady of Georgia, made this the basis of his call for a solid South. Speaking of the prevalent fear that Negroes might become the balance of power in the South, he said:

> This fear has kept and will keep, the whites solid! It would keep the intelligence and responsibility of any community, North or South, solid. . . . The supremacy of the white race of the South must be maintained forever.[10]

Actually when Grady issued his formal call for a solid South, the status gains made by Negroes immediately following the Civil War had been virtually erased. For all practical purposes, Southern whites were already solidly allied against the advancement of Negroes. Severe informal restrictions placed upon Negroes were already being sanctioned by state legislatures. Laws were passed restricting the freedom of Negroes in all phases of racial contacts from place of residence to marriage.

Jim Crow laws passed by state legislatures were vigorously enforced by "lily-white" police and courts. The courts, in effect, became the very effective strong arm of anti-Negro senti-

[7] Rayford W. Logan, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

[8] The Fourteenth Amendment "recalled" this implication in the Dred Scott decision and clearly defined citizenship in terms of birth in the United States.

[9] For a brief but comprehensive discussion of Jim Crow laws see C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961).

[10] Henry W. Grady, *The New South* (1890), pp. 239–243. See also Thomas N. Page, *The Negro: The Southerner's Problem* (1904), pp. 104–108.

ment, notwithstanding the guarantee of full citizenship accorded Negroes by the federal government.[11]

In 1883 the Supreme Court declared the Civil Rights Act of 1875—guaranteeing Negroes equal rights to the full and equal enjoyment of public accommodations—unconstitutional. This decision tended to give federal sanction to the large body of Jim Crow laws that had already been passed and paved the way for others that followed. And in 1896 the Supreme Court sustained the infamous "separate but equal" doctrine.[12] This decision did "stamp[s] the colored race with a badge of inferiority," as Mr. Justice Brown pointed out in his dissent, and condemned them to second-class citizenship with the avowed approval of the highest court. Thus, all levels of government in the United States countenanced the practice of limiting the freedom of Negroes. Through laws and customs Negroes were confined to the physical, social, and cultural ghettos assigned them by a hostile white majority.

For more than fifty years, the Supreme Court repeatedly refused to grant Negroes freedom to participate in the wider society as equal citizens. Finally, in 1954, the court reversed itself and declared the 1896 decision null and void.[13] Since then, each President of the United States and Congress have joined federal courts in support of the Negro's right to enjoy the same freedoms as other citizens. Yet, despite all efforts on the part of the federal government—and some state governments outside the South—the vast majority of Negroes, in 1964, are still confined to Negro ghettos—in the broadest connotation—with little or no opportunity to enjoy the degree of freedom accorded and guaranteed white citizens. Thus, the desire for freedom is the ultimate source of the Negro protest.

[11] Gunnar Myrdal, *op. cit.*, pp. 550–555.

[12] *Plessy* v. *Ferguson*, 163 U.S. 537.

[13] *Brown* v. *Board of Education of Topeka*, 347, U.S. 483 (1954).

Security

A second basic human desire is the desire for security. Here again, in order to understand the essential nature of the Negro protest it is necessary to take into account the fact that no other group in American society has been subjected to the great degree and variety of insecurities as has the Negro.

Insecurity of the person. As mentioned earlier, Negroes were regarded as chattel during the slave period. Insofar as the law was concerned they had no more security of person than a domestic animal. There was no legal or recognized extralegal machinery according to which they could receive redress of wrongs committed against them.

The Emancipation Proclamation and the Reconstruction Amendments—Thirteenth, Fourteenth and Fifteenth—were intended to provide full citizenship status for Negroes and to guarantee them equal protection of the law. The extent to which Negroes have actually received protection of the law varies, of course, from one section of the nation to another and from one community to another. Yet, even now, there is hardly anywhere in the United States where Negroes can expect the same degree of personal security as guaranteed their white neighbors. For the most part, even in communities where Negroes constitute a large segment of the population, local governments, including the total legal machinery, are controlled by white officials who often evince definite anti-Negro sentiments. The fact is that there are today only a few communities, North or South, where Negroes do not complain about police brutality and inequal justice.

As frustrating as have been the un-

certain racial practices of constituted legal authority, they have not been nearly as frustrating as the prevalence of violence and the threat of mob behavior. The situation Myrdal described in the 1940's persists in some sections of the South today. He said:

> It is the custom in the South to permit whites to resort to violence against the life, personal security, property and freedom of movement of Negroes. There is a wide variety of behavior, ranging from a mild admonition to murder, which the white man may exercise to control Negroes.[14]

The truth of this statement is underscored by the fact that since the Civil War there have been of record approximately 5,000-plus lynchings. There was an average of 150 a year from 1882 to 1901. In one year, 1892, there was a high of 231![15] Many of these reflected extreme sadism.

Although lynching has been diminishing during the last twenty years or so, it is still resorted to in certain Southern communities when Negro protest begins to threaten the biracial *status quo*. Consequently, there has been a revival of the Ku Klux Klan in some sections of the Deep South where Negro protest is beginning to be voiced boldly for the first time. In these same communities lynchings and violence against Negroes are increasing.

Finally, it should be noted in this connection that no white person in the South has ever been executed for the murder of a Negro. As a general practice, no one is even arrested for participating in mob violence against Negroes. In rare instances when arrests have been made and guilt established, white culprits have been either set free or given very light sentences.

Insecurity of citizenship. In addition to the constant threat of violence, Negroes continue to experience citizenship insecurity attendant to their being a virtually powerless minority. As it stands now, only a small number of Negroes are in any political decision-making positions anywhere in the United States, and they are more or less completely disfranchised in many communities in the Deep South. Therefore, when any governmental decision is being made that might somehow affect the welfare of Negroes there is naturally great uneasiness on their part because they are most vulnerable.

The Negro's feeling of insecurity is well founded. For instance, since the 1954 Supreme Court decision outlawing segregation in public education, Southern state legislatures have passed scores of "Black Codes," and some have voted "Interposition" in order that they might preserve the existing biracial system. Also the anti-Negro issue is still the most effective means of getting votes in many Deep South counties (parishes in Louisiana).

Furthermore, Southern legislatures and city councils have done about everything in their power to curb the Negro protest. They have outlawed civil rights organizations, prevented any sort of public demonstration, and even made verbal protest illegal on the part of teachers.

Economic insecurity. There are those who believe that the most debilitating insecurity experienced by Negroes is economic. It is true, of course, that the economic status of Negroes is a great deal higher than in 1865, when it was near zero, and it has continued to improve in recent decades; yet, the fact remains that Negroes still lag far behind whites in this area. Even now, after almost twenty years of general prosperity, their average income is just a little more than half—54 per cent—that of white persons. Their unemploy-

[14] Gunnar Myrdal, *op. cit.*, p. 558.

[15] Ralph Ginzberg, *100 Years of Lynchings* (New York: Lancer Books, 1962), p. 244.

ment rate is still about twice as high as the national average.[16]

The desire for recognition

A third basic human desire that constitutes the fountainhead of deep frustrations and protest among Negroes is the desire for recognition—"to be somebody." To some extent all Negroes seem to feel that their status—be it class, professional, or "purely" economic—is considerably lower than it would be if they were white. One frequently hears this kind of statement or implication among all socioeconomic classes of Negroes: "All things being equal . . . if I were white I would have . . . gotten a particular job . . . been elected to some public position . . . been awarded some honor . . . or had more money."

The fundamental *raison d'être* of the biracial system in the United States is precisely that of denying Negroes equality of opportunity to become recognized. Thus, while some few Negroes have undoubtedly gained higher social status in the Negro ghetto than they could have possibly achieved in the community or nation at large, where competitors are more numerous and competition keener, the fact remains that in every area of American society there is a ceiling on the estimable aspirations of Negroes.

Though no one knows, or perhaps could ever know, exactly what proportion of Negroes are underemployed, the extent to which talents and abilities of Negroes have been allowed to remain fallow or unused, and the degree to which the biracial system has discouraged ambition—yet, every scientific study of this problem concurs that in practically every area of American society too much of the vast potential among Negroes is allowed to go unrecognized, and, of course, unused.[17] This is true even in sports, where able Negro athletes now enjoy great success and wide recognition. For example, talented Negro baseball players encounter a ceiling in this career which would tend to discourage ambition. There are still no Negro big-league managers and umpires—to say nothing about the absence of Negroes in top management.

What is true in sports is certainly true in other occupational fields, particularly in the professions. Therefore, speaking of the Negro professional, Myrdal writes:

> In the existing American civilization he can grow to a degree of distinction, but always as a representative of "his people," not as an ordinary American or an individual in humanity. . . . Even if ordinarily he should have the interests and the aptitudes for wider knowledge and a broader career, the pressure of this expectancy on the part of society conditions his personality and forces him, willy-nilly, into the role of a Negro.[18]

Myrdal concludes that the "souls" of Negroes are "pressed into one single narrow furrow of human interests by the tyrannic expectancy of society."

Not only does the biracial system limit opportunities of Negroes to achieve recognition in most areas of community and national life, but some Negro leaders point out that prevailing racial mores function to prevent public recognition of Negroes even when they merit acclaim. Thus, for example, outstanding accomplishments of Negroes are generally omitted from school texts and overlooked by the press and other news media,[19] and, until the present, the tal-

[16] For a summary of the relative economic status of Negroes see *The Journal of Negro Education,* Vol. XXXII, No. 4, Section 3, pp. 349–401.

[17] For a comprehensive analysis of this problem see Eli Ginzberg, *The Negro Potential* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1956).

[18] Gunnar Myrdal, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

[19] As we shall see later, this was the main reason for the emergence of the Negro history movement and the Negro press.

ents and contributions of Negroes have been systematically picked over or discounted when it comes to selecting specialists for local or even national programs, conferences, or employment. Generally speaking, there are today still very few Negroes in decision-making positions anywhere in the United States. These power positions, it should be remembered, afford the most numerous opportunities for recognition.

All of this adds up to a well-established fact: Negroes who desire recognition outside the narrow confines of the Negro ghetto have continued to be frustrated by formidable traditional and legal barriers that have been expertly structured to prevent them from the normal gratification of that desire.

The desire for response

This fourth basic human desire is much more subtle, yet nonetheless potent, than the other desires mentioned. Fundamentally, it is the desire to be wanted, respected, loved, and, of course, accepted. It is, therefore, entirely obvious from the outset that this desire, perhaps more than any other on the part of Negroes, has met with the most stubborn, deep-seated resistance. This is so because not only has the custom of segregation and social ostracism been applied to every significant aspect of social life in the United States, but, what is even more important, it has been justified by a web of traditional beliefs and pseudoscientific theories that condemn the Negro as an inferior human being.[20]

During the slave period Negroes were traditionally and legally regarded as chattel, with little more acknowledged humanity than domestic animals. Since the Civil War, this conception of Negroes has changed greatly, so that it is no longer respectable to express such a belief. However, certain powerful white individuals and groups persist in the belief of Negro inferiority in the face of outstanding contributions by Negroes in just about every area of our national life, and contrary scientific findings notwithstanding. And so everywhere Negroes continue to encounter some degree of rejection stemming from actual or alleged belief in their inferiority. This is essentially the main problem of integration. Negroes who meet every qualification to participate in some group, community, or institutional activity generally find themselves rejected as persons or at least ignored to some significant degree. Their desire to become a part of the "we" group is often frustrated long after they have been formally included in the membership.[21]

The particular pattern of rejection of Negroes may vary from one time to another and from one community to another. However, by and large, it is composed of the same general characteristics: some degree of corporal punishment, either by the police, zealous individuals, or mobs; public insults, especially by politicians; the propaganda of anti-Negro theories or stereotypes; epithets; the refusal to extend Negroes common, simple courtesies—such as calling them "Mr.," "Mrs.," or "Miss"; and well-calculated sneers.

Except in rare instances, Negroes, regardless of their abilities and accomplishments, experience some measure of rejection when they attempt to enter the mainstream of American life. This, of course, has been a perennial cause of the Negro protest.

SOME TECHNIQUES OF PROTEST

It is never entirely safe for members of a relatively powerless minority to protest what they regard as unjust treat-

[20] Gunnar Myrdal, *op. cit.*, Chapters 4–6.

[21] Some refer to such a situation as *desegregation*, which is formal admittance, as opposed to *integration*, or informal, personal acceptance.

ment on the part of the powerful majority. Inherent in such a situation is the danger that a vindictive "backlash" within the majority group might be created which may somehow retaliate. This has always been a very realistic threat where Negroes are concerned. Retaliatory measures against them have ranged —depending upon the time and place— from public criticism to the more damaging economic reprisals, police brutality, and lynching.

Despite the ever-present threat of the retaliation that protest might engender, there has never been a time when Negroes did not find some way to express their dissatisfaction with their disesteemed, disadvantaged social status.

> He (the Negro) might protest; if he does it for the proper audience and in the proper forms, he is allowed to protest: but he protests as a Negro.[22]

Indirect verbal protest

Although numerous "Black Codes" or laws were designed specifically to prevent slaves from assembling, many continued to find ways of meeting secretly throughout the slave period. The most common, alleged purpose for meeting was for worship. There sprang up secret religious groups sometimes referred to as the "invisible church." Furthermore, in contradiction to restrictive laws, some religious slave masters allowed Negroes to establish their own churches and worship publicly

The slave churches, as were true of churches founded by free Negroes during that period, served many important social functions. For my purpose I need cite only three that are closely interrelated: they became the focus around which some degree of racial unity was achieved; they began to define the ethics of race relations; and they served as the nucleus of the Negro protest.

[22] Gunnar Myrdal, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

By and large, slave protest was veiled and indirect because the probability of retaliation from white persons was always imminent. Consequently, whether by design or accident, slave preachers immediately appropriated the techniques of symbolic protest so skillfully employed by powerless minorities in the Bible. They sensibly refrained from attacking directly the slave system or their masters. Instead the preachers developed imaginative, creative homiletic styles wherein their protest was vicarious.

Slave preachers led their people to identify with the oppressed, but "Chosen People" of God, as they assumed to be true of the ancient Hebrews. All slaves knew that the oppressor, so symbolically represented by "Pharaoh," for example, was in fact each one of their masters. And just as God was displeased with the way the Hebrews were treated, He was also displeased with their oppression under the slave system, and would also eventually deliver them from their "Egyptian" bondage.

All members of the congregation were permitted to join the preacher in protest through the medium of the spirituals they created and sang. Those who have studied traditional Negro spirituals see in them an eloquent and dramatic protest against the indignities and oppressions slaves experienced. A few well-known titles reveal the validity of this interpretation: "I'm gonna tell God all my troubles," "Nobody knows the trouble I've seen," and "Go Down Moses . . . tell ole Pharaoh to let my people go."

Not only did the creative theology in the slave sermons and the Negro spirituals serve as effective media of protest against the system of slavery, but even now some versions of both are still used as protest media. And so it is that the Negro church remains—in the thinking of some white supremacists—the nu-

cleus of the Negro protest. This is clearly indicated by the recent wave of bombings and burnings of Negro churches in certain Deep South communities where Negro protest is just beginning to be expressed openly and boldly. It is also significant that an old traditional Negro spiritual—"We Shall Overcome"—is the more or less official theme song of the present Negro protest movement.

Direct verbal protest

Whenever Negroes dared, they have protested directly against the biracial system. As a matter of fact, this has been the most frequently employed technique because it lends itself to many modes of expression. Sermons by Negro preachers are often attacks on the system of segregation generally and on specific incidents and persons. Thus, a few years ago a nationally known Negro minister preached a sermon on the subject "To Hell with Bilbo."

What has been true of Negro sermons has been true of every other verbal media available to Negroes. One can hear the protest motif in speeches made on any and all occasions, in essays, in jokes, in the stated purposes of all Negro organizations, and eloquently expressed in practically all Negro prose and poetry.[23]

Practically all forms and styles of verbal protest expressed by Negroes have come to focus in three main media —the Negro newspapers and magazines, the convention movement, and the Negro history movement.

Negro newspapers. The very existence of "Negro" newspapers is, itself, a sort of protest. They came into being because of the general feeling among Negroes that they were systematically ignored by white newspapers for their noteworthy deeds and that their negative behavior was too greatly emphasized. Throughout the history of Negro newspapers they have remained loyal to their avowed purpose—expressing Negro protest. In a very real sense they may be described as Myrdal said of individual Negro leaders: They are "imprisoned in the Negro problem."[24] Yet, this singular dedication of Negro newspapers to the "Negro cause" has been the prime reason for the effective organization of the Negro protest.

Conventions. The "convention movement" was begun by free Negroes during the slave period.[25] Responding to common circumstances limiting their civil rights, Negro leaders from many sections of the nation began to meet in order to find some unified way of elevating the status of their race. From the beginning, these conventions provided an important platform for Negro protest. The extent of their protest is reflected in the following statements made in conventions.

In protest against attempts to colonize Negroes in Africa:

> For here were we born, for this country our fathers and brothers fought, and here we hope to remain in the full enjoyment of enfranchised manhood.

In summarizing the purpose of a convention:

> Our mottoes are liberty and labor, enfranchisement and education! The spelling-book and the hoe, the hammer and the vote, the opportunity to work and to rise . . . we ask for ourselves and our children.[26]

Throughout the years since their beginning, conventions have continued to provide excellent opportunities to voice the Negro protest. Negro leaders have

[23] For a full discussion of this see excerpts in Daniel C. Thompson, *op. cit.*

[24] Gunnar Myrdal, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

[25] August Meier, *Negro Thought in America, 1880–1915* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1963), pp. 4–10.

[26] Quoted in August Meier, *op. cit.*, pp. 5, 9.

used this medium to direct protest at every form of segregation, discrimination, and indignity that Negroes experience. The particular priority may differ from one convention to another but the format is always similar—the biracial system is denounced, and Negroes are implored to unite in order to exert a maximum effort for their own self-improvement.

Negro history movement. This movement was prompted by the fact that, as a rule, the Negro's contributions have been generally omitted in the writings of white historians. Even more frustrating than being overlooked has been the practice of reporting incidents that tended to picture Negroes as inferior.

At least two significant dimensions of the Negro protest are reflected in the Negro history movement: one, Negro scholars generally, and historians in particular, have sought to counter certain pernicious notions and stereotypes perpetrated by some influential white scholars about Negroes.[27] And two Negro intellectuals have sought to create racial pride by uncovering facts about the past accomplishments of Negroes, including their African heritage.[28]

Negro scholars have published a formidable number of books, papers, poetry, prose, tracts, and the like that stand as an eloquent protest for being overlooked, thus unrecognized, by some widely read white scholars. In essence, all exclaim, "We are somebody!" The titles of two very different books emphasize this point. One, a history text by Merle R. Eppse, *The Negro, Too, In American History* (1939), and the other, a novel by James Baldwin, *Nobody Knows My Name.*

Direct action

Direct confrontation with the laws and traditions that undergird the biracial system is especially dangerous. This technique actually challenges the legitimacy of the system itself. And whereas in the etiquette of race relations the Negro "might protest (verbally); if he does it in the proper form,"[29] direct action is always regarded as an act of defiance and a violation of the etiquette of race relations.[30]

Despite the great danger involved, militant Negro leaders have always used direct action when they could induce a sufficient number of Negroes to follow them. This technique was frequently used by Negro slaves who knew full well that they did so at the certain risk of their lives. There is reliable documentation of more than two hundred slave revolts—planned or executed. Some of these were viciously fought.[31] Throughout the years since slavery Negroes have dared, from time to time, to take direct action against the biracial system. Until recent years, such action was sporadic and short-lived, it was far too dangerous to be sustained for any significant length of time.

The modern counterpart of the slave revolts is the Black Muslim movement.[32] This organization is based upon the assumption that the white man's prejudices are so deeply ingrained that Negroes can never do anything to change

[27] For an excellent summary of "Racial Beliefs" see Gunnar Myrdal, *op. cit.*, Chapter 4.

[28] For a poignant example of the compulsive protest motive in this endeavor, see J. Saunders Redding, *On Being Negro In America* (New York: Charter Books, 1962). On page 6, Redding exclaims: "I hope this piece will stand as the epilogue to whatever contribution I have made to the 'literature of race.' I want to get on to other things. . . . I am tired of giving up my creative initiative to these demands."

[29] Gunnar Myrdal, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

[30] Race riots are not included because they have a destructive rather than constructive goal.

[31] Herbert Aptheker, *American Negro Slave Revolts* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1943), p. 162.

[32] C. Eric Lincoln, *The Black Muslims in America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961).

it. Instead they glorify the black man and seek a separate state apart from what they regard as corrupt white civilization. Also they completely reject the nonviolent philosophy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and openly advocate violence as one important means of gaining race pride and respect. Members of this organization have been involved in some violent incidents, and constitute a constant threat; yet, until now, most of their protest has been verbal. Certainly they have not attempted bold, organized revolts comparable to some engaged in by slaves.

Before the 1950's, Negro action protest was usually that of individuals. Most of it was intended to test laws regarded as unconstitutional. As a rule the NAACP handled these cases with amazing success.[33]

All action protest techniques were refined and blended in the 1955–1956 Montgomery Bus Boycott under the direction of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. This movement caught the eyes, ears, and imaginations of Negroes and whites throughout the world. Since then some form of direct action—boycotts, sit-ins, kneel-ins, freedom rides, public demonstrations of all sorts, and placard-carrying marchers—have become daily incidents as Negroes protest their confinement to segregated ghettos.

[33] For a summary see Langston Hughes, *Fight for Freedom: The Story of the NAACP* (New York: Berkley Medallion Books, 1962), Chapter 4.

SOME CONSEQUENCES OF THE NEGRO PROTEST

The Negro protest movement, so much a part of American culture today, had its beginning during the slave period. The slaves' protest against bondage, insecurity, anonymity, and indignity has been echoed, in one form or another, continuously. Therefore, it may be appropriate to conclude this discussion with a summary answer to this question: What has the protest accomplished?

It seems to me it has had three very far-reaching results: (1) It created and fostered racial unity and pride. (2) It created a favorable public opinion, especially in the North. Those who have been convinced of the rightness of the "Negro's cause" and of the inherent injustices in the existing biracial system, have served as a sort of conscience for this nation. They have always rendered scathing judgments against those who violate the civil rights of Negroes. On the positive side, they have supported all efforts made by Negroes to improve themselves. (3) Organized Negro protest has eventually resulted in solid political action. This action has been building up for decades and finally came to climax in the Civil Rights Act of 1964. At long last this act guarantees Negroes equality of citizenship under the law. Finally, the Negro protest has functioned to nurture America's faith in the superiority of the democratic process.